

Interview with David Gilbert

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Excerpt from Interview # 5: April 22, 2014

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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Gilbert: I don't know, did I tell you the story about St. Louis?

DePue: I don't think.

Gilbert: Going down to Alan Dixon, when he was state treasurer, or secretary of state, he used to have an outing every summer, and the Cubs and the Cardinals would play a twilight double-header, start three o'clock in the afternoon the first game, the second game would start at about seven. So he would take busloads—there would probably be eight to ten buses from Springfield to St. Louis for the Cardinal/Cub doubleheader. And as you know, Springfield is pretty divided in terms of Cub/Cardinal fans. Southern Illinois, of course, is Cardinal country.

DePue: And that's the classic national league—

Gilbert: Rivalry.

DePue: Rivalry, yeah.

Gilbert: Yeah, yeah, that was a good one. So Thompson was invited by the St. Louis Cardinals to present Jack Buck, who had been their announcer for twenty-five years, a plaque for his twenty-five years of broadcasting Cardinal baseball, in between games. So it sold out, the stadium is sold out. Dixon may have bought half the seats, I don't know, (laughter) or been given half the seats. But it's a hot summer day, and the first game is over, and Thompson steps to home plate with Jack Buck. And he says, "Jack, I'm happy to present to you this plaque on behalf of the St. Louis Cardinals for your twenty-five years of broadcasting Cardinal games, and I wish you another twenty-five years." And everybody cheered, and it was wonderful. And then Thompson takes the mic, and he says, "And I must let every one of you know that I was born a Cub fan and I will die a Cub fan." (laughter) And you have never heard such boos in your life. I mean,

the place just erupted. Beer cups are flying out of the stand. Hats are flying. I mean, it was nasty. And Thompson ran for cover, but he didn't know where to go, and he runs into the St. Louis Cardinal dugout. (laughter) Well, I'm with the state police, the security police. We had been down behind the fence, and I see which way he's going, and I say, "Oh gosh, we've got to get down there." So we go down. I meet Thompson, and I say, "Come on, we're going up to see Jack Brickhouse," who was broadcasting the games on WGN, the Cub games. So we go up to the broadcast booth. Thompson sits down with Brickhouse, and Brickhouse says, "Governor, I've got to hand it to you, that was just the greatest speech I've ever heard. That was..." And this is going back to Chicago and all over Illinois, to all the Cub fans. And blah, blah, blah, and, "Yeah, well, Governor..." And this is during the campaign. And he said, "Well, you know, how's the campaign going?" So Thompson does this interview. For weeks after that he would walk down the streets of Chicago, or mainly northern Illinois, people are beeping their horn, "Hey, Governor, I heard you on WGN! Way to go, Cubs!" (laughter) It was probably the most important campaign stop Thompson made during the whole campaign, in St. Louis, at home plate in Cardinal Stadium.